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Letter dated 22 December 2017 from the Permanent Representatives of Sweden, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and Uruguay to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Sweden and Uruguay, as Co-Chairs of the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security, and in close cooperation with the United Kingdom, hereby transmit a summary note of the meeting held on 5 December 2017 on Afghanistan (see annex).

We would be grateful if the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Olof **Skoog**
Ambassador

(*Signed*) Matthew **Rycroft**
Ambassador

(*Signed*) Elbio **Rosselli**
Ambassador

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Annex to the letter dated 22 December 2017 from the Permanent Representatives of Sweden, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and Uruguay to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security: summary of the meeting on Afghanistan, held on 5 December 2017

On 5 December 2017, the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security convened a meeting on the situation in Afghanistan. Members of the Security Council were briefed by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), Tadamichi Yamamoto, and the Human Rights Director of UNAMA, Danielle Bell. After the briefings, Council members' questions were focused on the participation of women and the presence of gender expertise in UNAMA itself, the role of and support needed by local women's organizations, including in their interactions with the government at the local and national levels, and the role of religious leaders in facilitating positive cultural change in the country.

The briefers updated Council members on key developments since the meeting held by the Informal Expert Group in November 2016 (see S/2016/1059). For example, the Government has committed itself to implementing its national action plan on women and peace and security in several important forums over the past few months, including as part of its candidacy for membership in the Human Rights Council. The plan, led by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and involving 20 different ministries, has baselines and targets for 10 of its indicators, while the remaining 29 indicators are still being finalized. Since August 2016, there have been discussions on its budget, but a financing mechanism has not been agreed upon. Participants called upon the Government to be held accountable for implementation of the national action plan on women and peace and security and to not let the discussion about funding excuse poor implementation and weak participation of women in key peace and security processes. At the national level, there are 12 women in the 62-member High Peace Council, an increase from the previous year, and the percentage of women in the provincial peace councils also grew from 9 per cent to over 22 per cent. However, there are only 3 women and 79 men in the joint secretariat of the High Peace Council, and there is a similarly abysmal representation of women among the support staff of these structures. The women and peace and security working group, a forum that regularly brings together Government ministries, United Nations entities, civil society organizations and embassies of donor countries, continues to coordinate in all these matters, including by providing input for the development, over the past year, of a national strategy on countering violent extremism.

The United Nations annual Open Days on Women and Peace and Security consisted of 13 dialogues in the provinces and the capital, which were held in October and November 2017 and were focused on the challenges to women's participation in the upcoming presidential and parliamentary elections of 2018. In response to questions about the role of religious leaders, UNAMA noted that they were invited to consultations frequently, and one mullah made a 19-point presentation on how sharia upholds and protects women's rights in elections and wrote and disseminated a paper on this to all mosques in Nangarhar Province, one of the most conservative areas. It is important that the international community continue to engage with and support and promote these voices. In the Government of Afghanistan, there is only one woman minister; another had been proposed alongside the 12 ministerial candidates recently submitted for confirmation by the lower house of parliament, but was rejected. While reforms implemented by the Ministry of the Interior, namely, changes in facilities and

the establishment of policewomen councils and sexual assault complaints mechanisms, have helped to double the number of female recruits to the Afghan National Police, with plans to double it again by 2020, their overall percentage remains low. A similar trend can be found in the Afghan National Army; a record number of female officers graduated in 2016, but women still represent between 1 and 2 per cent of the force, far from the Ministry of Defence's target of reaching 10 per cent. The Government is implementing measures to encourage women to apply to the civil service and to address workplace harassment, and currently 22.5 per cent of civil servants in Afghanistan are women.

The drafts of the family law, the reconciliation of civil disputes law, the mediation regulation and the anti-harassment law — all of them important for women's rights — are currently under consultation between the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Women's Affairs, the Ministry of Public Health and civil society organizations, with inputs and technical advice from the United Nations. The 2015 regulation to eliminate the harassment of women has not been implemented properly, and none of the ministerial or provincial anti-harassment committees are operational yet. In March, the new Penal Code was finally adopted; it includes a progressive and comprehensive definition of rape, defines the crime of *bacha bazi* and codifies war crimes. However, the international community is concerned about the removal of a chapter on violence against women and girls, given that the future of the 2009 Elimination of Violence against Women Law depends on legislators in parliament, where it is often contested and challenged. Briefers reported that there are now special tribunals (*Dewan Khas*) for the elimination of violence against women in 15 provinces and prosecution units for the same purpose in 34 provinces, and that women make up 12 per cent of the workforce of the Supreme Court, 21 per cent of all judges in Afghanistan and 15 per cent of the staff of the Office of the Attorney General.

In 2017, most women casualties were killed during ground engagements because fighting typically takes place in residential areas in suicide and complex attacks, such as the car bombing of 31 May in Kabul, which killed at least 150 people and was one of the deadliest incidents since 2001, and air strikes owing to anti-Government elements taking shelter in residential homes. On at least five separate occasions, UNAMA documented cases of executions of women by Taliban-run courts, and only one verified case of conflict-related sexual violence. However, the family protection centres reported many cases of sexual violence during the first three quarters of the year, including 171 cases of rape. Maternal mortality is the highest in the world, especially among young women and girls, and the closure of clinics owing to the intensification of the fighting, coupled with restrictions on women's movement in many parts of the country, is a serious impediment to their access to health. According to the United Nations Children's Fund, it is estimated that at least one third of girls are married before the age of 18, and in April 2017 the Government of Afghanistan launched the national action plan to eliminate early and child marriages (2017–2021).

Women currently comprise 15.4 per cent of the staff in UNAMA, an increase of 2 per cent from the previous year. This ranges from 34 per cent at the senior level and 30 per cent of international staff to 7 per cent of national staff. The adoption of special measures notwithstanding, the number has not improved because of the low vacancy rates for national posts. Outside of Kabul, Mazar-e Sharif and Herat, it is rare for women to be able to work outside the home, and some women do not even tell their families or neighbours that they are working for the United Nations. The latest strategic review recommended the redeployment of the Mission's gender advisory capacity from the Human Rights Service to the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, in line with Security Council resolution 2242 (2015), and

such redeployment, encompassing one P-5, one P-3 and one national post, has been included in the UNAMA budget submission for 2018.

The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), as the secretariat of the Informal Expert Group, called upon current and incoming Council members to defend the existing language on women and peace and security in the upcoming mandate negotiations, as well as the provisions for gender expertise in budget negotiations, and to follow up on the implementation of the gender-related recommendations of the technical assessment mission conducted by the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate in Afghanistan in 2017, whose report will be circulated to the Informal Expert Group. UN-Women also called for greater emphasis on the participation of women in actual talks — beyond the number of women in the High Peace Council — and the protection of women's human rights defenders. The Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict encouraged the United Nations to make full use of Security Council resolution 2331 (2016) in their review of the national strategy to counter violent extremism and to renew efforts to address the under-reporting of conflict-related sexual violence and continue to monitor it.

The Co-Chairs committed themselves to follow up on the recommendations.